

F O C U S

O N

W O R S H I P

Report #11

MCC Peace Section

Task Force on Women in Church and Society

July, 1976

Greetings to all our new readers. Response to our last newsletter was fantastic! Names for the mailing list keep pouring in accompanied by welcome letters which are included in this report. It's great to hear from you out there. Keep it coming.

This report focuses on worship. Included are examples of readings, litanies, poems and resources for planning meaningful services. We hope these may help inspire many of you in creating and planning services in which you are involved. Conducting liturgy and worship are areas in which women are becoming increasingly involved. This was obvious at the May retreat for women in ministry held in Lombard, Illinois. Read Gloria Martin's report in this issue.

You may have ideas or experiences which you would like to share. Why don't you send them to us?

Sue Steiner

Margaret L. Reimer, editors

RESPONSES AND
REACTIONS

I just read your announcement in Daughters of Sarah and was delighted to discover that your group even exists. My feminist contacts are entirely within the States (we moved here only eighteen months ago), but I'm anxious to find out what's going on among biblical feminists in Canada. Is your newsletter available to people outside the Mennonite church? . . .

In the meantime, the Lord God give you so much vision that you can hardly bear it.

Bonnie M. Greene
Editor of Vanguard
Toronto, Ont.

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I was very encouraged to see that there is now a Task Force on Women in Church and Society in our church and I would very much like to be on their mailing list for the Newsletter and for any other pertinent publications.

If there were to be any workshops or gatherings of any kinds I would presume the ladies in all congregations would be notified. It seems as if this

is an area that very much needs to be opened up in our church and discussed so we can better see ourselves in relation to the church.

I wish the Task Force the very best in their endeavours.

Lois Porter
London, Ont.

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The enclosed is my daughter's address. Since her husband is a minister, she may be receiving the Task Force Newsletter. But if not, please add her name. I have another daughter, but she is on the mailing list.

I so much appreciate the Task Force newsletter and wish I could identify more closely with your endeavours. Maybe I can someday when Lawrence is no longer president of G.C. (Goshen College). Right now my energies seem to be consumed locally.

But I am with your cause in heart and spirit and am thrilled with the many developments inside and outside the church. We've come a long way since I became actively interested in this subject about 12 years ago.

Harriet Burkholder
Goshen, Ind.

I have been receiving the Task Force Report since its early days and enjoy it very much, particularly because it keeps me abreast of Mennonite thought on feminism. My interest began at Goshen College from where I graduated in 1973. I am not a great joiner of movements, nor a great writer of letters to editors. However, I am so disappointed with the possibility of professional Mennonite women meeting in a seminar that I feel I must send my opinion to you.

I view the feminism movement as one which liberates all those victimized by the hierarchical system created predominantly by men. In other words, I want to see women and men freed to pursue their own interests unhindered by the genitals with which they happen to be endowed - whether that be to become a full-time home worker or a contributor in the outside "working" world.

But the sexual aspect of the system is only one area of concern. We are also faced with discrimination based on arbitrarily set opinions of importance. For example, the orchestral conductor and players are applauded; the ticket collectors, cleaners and stage hands are considered dispensable. Yet the performance depends upon these sub-servants to do the dirty work. In contrast to this more and more groups are forming who both perform and serve. Professionals are placed near the top of the working hierarchical system with manual and supportive workers near the bottom. This system affects people regardless of sex. I believe feminists must work to eradicate this aspect of the system as well.

I do not believe a seminar for Mennonite professional women advances this aim. Such a select seminar emulates the oppressive system. Professional women may feel that they have a unique situation; but are they so unique that they would be of no interest to the nonprofessional, but feminist female?

If all classes of workers would stop considering themselves as special and apart from others of a different emphasis, we would come closer to elim-

inating discrimination of all forms. I contend that professional Mennonite women are not so special as to need an exclusive seminar. Rather I wish we could see a uniting of professionals and the working classes on equal terms of worth, forgetting labels of secular world.

Let us try in all we do to find an alternative to the present system. It is not the only one.

Nancy Kinsinger Halder
London, England

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I received a copy of Report #10 from a friend and found it quite interesting. The report on Total Woman stated the facts about the book in a very acceptable way. Those who felt the book was excellent need not feel ashamed for reacting that way and those who found it ridiculous could also hold their heads up. Luann Martin's article should prove helpful to my teenage daughters who will soon find themselves in the job hunting sector. As church librarian, the page of book reviews is also helpful. Thank you for putting this altogether.

I would like you to look into the subject of "wife abuse." This was part of Saturday Night News in March and I notice the public television station will cover the topic on "Woman". Apparently very little has been done in this area for the women and children involved.

Please add me to your mailing list.

Sarah J. Shelly
Allentown, Pa.

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I just read an article about the Women in Ministry Conference (April 30-May 2) in Illinois and it mentioned a newsletter that was put out by MCC's Peace Section's task force on women. If such a newsletter exists or if you know of any future conferences with the emphasis on Women in ministry, I would certainly appreciate it if you could send me information about it, or put me on the mailing list.

Pam Churchill
Winnipeg, Man.

I am interested in having more information concerning the notice in the Gospel Herald about third world involvement. Are you interested in Americans in the third world or in my case African Mennonite women involvement?

I am so happy that there is a Task Force on women. I have gotten the Newsletter right from the beginning. I enjoy them and want to encourage you in every way possible.

I am a single missionary of some 17½ years in Somalia. There is much room for growth in wholeness for women and men on the mission field. Both are sadly lacking.

Bertha Beachy
Nairobi, Kenya

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Thanks to the Task Force on Women in Church and Society for the March-April newsletter. It is a great issue. I found it most gratifying that you have a male typist. It's good to see a male doing a job that's traditionally been relegated to women.

This past winter I've been involved with the Women's Centre at the YWCA here in Winnipeg and I'm finding the work challenging. I believe there is a similar organization at the YWCA in Waterloo. Please send copies of your newsletter to us. I'm also enclosing a copy of our current newsletter to acquaint the Task Force with some of the things being discussed here. If you should happen to wish a subscription, please write.

We wish you all the best in the work of the Task Force.

Darlene Driedger
Winnipeg, Man.

* * *

I am a Russian-born Mennonite. My cousin in Pennsylvania sent me a copy of your March-April 1976 issue and I was very impressed with the fine work you are doing in writing on various topics concerning women. I am enclosing a brochure to show you what we are doing re health care here.

Mary S. Stephens
Alachua, Florida

Re newsletter - love it! Keep up the fantastic work - you're not wishy-washy! Continue to relate to all women, not just professionals. Every woman's vote counts in politics.

Re abortion - put something in the paper about those of us (me included) whose abortions were just the ticket. Wow! To be pregnant (I was 43 at the time), after three children - slightly queasy, and then in five short minutes no more pregnancy. Fantastic! There are those of us (I know) for whom abortion was a happy trip with minimum discomfort. Please, please let women know some of us are happy about the choice to have abortions. Stop the guilt trips and the self-beating for so many women. I am active in Lancaster Women's Liberation - our Center's been active in the community for six years. Many interests.

Lois K. Eckman
Lancaster, Pa.

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We are currently organizing our periodical section of the Mennonite Library and Archives and are interested in including the Task Force Newsletter in our inventory. Upon reading about the Newsletter in the June 15, 1976 Gospel Herald, we felt that this newsletter would be a necessary addition to our collection. Please include us on your regular subscription list. We would like to keep a record of past issues of the newsletter. So if back issues are available, please compile and mail to us a set.

Cynthia Toews
Bethel College
North Newton, Kan.

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We would like to receive the Newsletter of the Task Force on Women in Church and Society. Would you please put the library on your mailing list? Also, would it be possible to receive copies of back issues of the Newsletter?

Sharon L. Klingelsmith
Goshen College
Goshen, Ind.

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CONFERENCE HELD
FOR WOMEN IN MINISTRY

The "Women in Ministry Conference", held April 30 to May 2, was announced as a "weekend conference of mutual study, encouragement and sharing." I was not disappointed. The conference was sponsored, not by a church agency, but by one concerned congregation, namely the Lombard Mennonite Church. The congregation, in providing for our physical needs and participating with us in input, worship and discussion, shared with us the same kind of support and encouragement they gave and continue to give to Joe and Emma Richards, their co-pastors. By closing time Sunday many of the 65 participants were leaving with some new thoughts and a measure of that encouragement and support.

One of the highlights of the weekend was certainly the addresses by Nancy Hardesty, co-author of All We're Meant to Be. For those who had read her book the Friday evening input, although enjoyable, was not all that new. Saturday morning, however, must have been new to almost all for she dealt with nineteenth century women in ministry, mostly from the Wesleyan tradition. While the sources Nancy used were new, many of the issues they raised were not.

Perhaps the most difficult was the question of "calling". It seems that the weekend provided the first opportunity some women had to discuss their own possibilities of calling to some more defined type of ministry. A call is at once something very personal and something more communal. Few congregations are presently open to affirming a woman's call to the ministry. Are we to respond then to the "urges within us" and the support of a few friends, as Nancy's nineteenth century women did? And if we do, where are we to minister? It is a wearying, discouraging sort of question. Some of the persons present at the conference felt it acutely.

Other discussions revolved around the rather ill-defined word "ministry." For the most part we spoke of ministry and meant the ordained, pastoral minis-

try in the more traditional sense. But do we want to fit into that form of ministry? Well, yes and no. No, we do not, ideally, for there are probably better ways of ministering to congregations including more team ministry and lay ministry. Yes, we do because that is still the most acceptable and popular form of ministry and therefore the point at which we must begin.

What about ordination? Again, there was ambiguity. Why is ordination so important to a church that believes that all members are ministers? On the other hand, since ordination is still the church's way of recognizing certain special abilities and responsibilities, why should women not also be allowed that recognition?

Persons present were in many ways similar to one another. Most of us were women. All of us were involved in or interested in participation with and ministry to the church. However, one important difference, that of urgency, was also present. Some women are close to losing patience. It has become an issue of faithfulness that the church must be called to move on, now. Others were more inclined to call for patience lest our hurrying move congregational members to further and further poles. Probably most of us moved uncomfortably somewhere in between, hoping for both patience and movement.

The conference did not solve anything. But somehow one person's bitterness mixed with another's humour, sharp-edged frustration was dulled by being shared, someone's hope touched another's weariness. Affirmations concluded the weekend. We would like a chance to meet again; the need for emotional and spiritual support will continue.

Gloria Martin
St. Jacobs, Ont.

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Sign on church nursery door:

THEY SHALL NOT ALL SLEEP, BUT
THEY SHALL ALL BE CHANGED.

AFFIRMATION
OF FAITH

I BELIEVE deep in my heart and soul and head that every human being of every size, intelligence, color, age, shape, sex, and national origin, has God's love, God's mercy and God's amazing grace.

I BELIEVE that self-love is a condition for loving others. That the living God perfectly parents all humankind, commands each person to love, respect and give equal privilege to all other human beings.

I BELIEVE that struggling for my personhood is my holy obligation to my Creator.

I BELIEVE that God is with me in my struggle for personhood which is necessary before the joy of loving is possible.

I BELIEVE that every woman must discover and accept her own created potential as God destined her to be rather than as the particular time and place dictates to her.

I BELIEVE that nothing can ever separate me from God's love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels won't, and all the powers of hell itself cannot keep God's love away. Our fear's for today, our worries about tomorrow or where we are - high above the sky, or in the deepest ocean - nothing - not even man-centered religions of the world - will ever be able to separate me from the love of God.

Joyce Slayton Mitchell
Coordinator of NOW Task Force on
Women and Religion in Wolcott, Vermont
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LITANY FOR MOTHERS' DAY
(OR ANY OTHER DAY)

Reader: We pause for a moment on this mothers' day to remember those who have been mothers to all of us, who through the ages have nurtured and cared for God's children and made this world a better place.

Congregation: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We think of the Earth, Giver of Life and Mother of all, reminding us, in this season, of new birth and new hope.

C: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We think of Eve, Mother of humankind, who took upon herself the sin of human frailty and left us both the joy and the pain of human endeavor.

C: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We remember Sarah, the Mother of Israel. We remember Rahab, the harlot from Jericho, who allied herself with God's cause and brought salvation to a people.

C: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We remember Hannah and Ruth and Elizabeth whose dreams were transformed into a mighty reality in their children.

C: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We remember Mary, the Mother of God.
(Pause)

R: We remember the mothers throughout history who have given us a glorious heritage. We are grateful for Sister Clare, Mother of poverty, who called the church to a new path. We are grateful for Sister Catherine of Siena who counselled popes and emperors. We are grateful for all the other saints who revealed another path to motherhood and service.

C: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We remember Anneken Jans of Rotterdam, drowned with other Anabaptists, who left her legacy to a little son and to the history of a people.

C: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We remember those who were mothers of movements - Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakers; Florence Nightingale, Mother of the sick; Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mother of slaves; and all the others who left home and family to minister, write and organize tirelessly for their cause.

(Continued)

C: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We remember queens and rulers and mothers of nations. We also remember the mothers who gave their lives for their children with unceasing love and self-denial.

C: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We remember also the living - Mother Theresa of Calcutta whose family is the poor, the sick and the homeless. We remember all those who are mothers in thousands of different ways in our world today.

C: Accept our thanks, O God.

R: We remember our mothers and grandmothers who taught us what it means to have a home and a family. We remember those who have never known their mothers. (Pause)

R: May the example of these mothers who have gone before, be our inspiration and our guide.

C: Amen.

Margaret Loewen Reimer
May, 1976

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NOAH'S WIFE - A POEM

Medieval church drama
was wrong:
she was no shrew,
knew a gentle

man
when she saw one.

She kept her poise
when creeping things
began to follow him in pairs,
when he promised tidal waves
in Nebraska
and engineered
a forty-day cruise
as second honeymoon.
On the ark she counted eggs,
dispensed fruit
and invented ballads
about dust storms

to dry the tears.

Commissioning a dove
was her idea.

He wanted to believe
it was open season,
wade out in hip boots.
She trusted the instinct
of her feathered sister
not to nest

until floating twigs took root
beneath the deluge.

While he ran after rainbows
only she lingered

to remark
that of every living kind
they had been male and female
except God.

Kathryn Christenson

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RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP

New Forms of Worship by James F. White.
The Future Present by Marianne H. Micks.
Two books which provide a broad background
to a theology of worship.

Because We Are One People. Songs for
worship, some new, some rewritten. Avail-
able for \$1.80 from Ecumenical Women's
Centers, 1653 W. School St. Chicago 60657.

Sistercelebrations ed. by Arlene Swidler.
Nine worship experiences, some a bit far
out. Fortress Press, 1974.

Dare to Seek by Penelope Morgan Colman.
A simple, dramatic reading with discussion
guides. Example of what any group could do
for its own special occasion. Available
for \$1.95 from Granger Publications, 4024
N.W. 30th Terr. Oklahoma City, OK. 73112.

Devotional Guide 1975-76. Published by
WMSC of the (Old) Mennonite Church. Con-
tains stories of women martyrs.

Worship materials, liturgies available from
Women Committed to Women, 817 W. 34th St.,
Los Angeles, Cal. 90007. Some excellent
resources.

A READING FOR WOMEN

Group I: Lord, I pray for courage to recognize that there is a broad way and a narrow way in life and that I must choose for Christ or against him.

Group II: I fear I may yield to the temptation to stand behind someone else in the accountability for my sin - perhaps a husband, a boyfriend, or someone else.

I: I pray that I may separate myself from the general uncertainty and confusion that is characteristic of the lives of some women and girls and catch a glimpse of God's purpose for my life.

II: I fear that I will retreat from personal growth because sometimes even growth is painful, for it forces me to face myself.

I: I pray for courage to recognize and use the spiritual gifts God has given me, regardless of how small or large they may be.

II: I fear I may yield to the temptation to disregard my gift, to quit looking for it, because it seems too forward to speak about having a gift from God.

I: I pray for wisdom to know how to handle the new independence and activity which is mine these days to become educated, to study the Word of God, to serve Him at home, at church, at work, at school, and in the community.

II: I fear that I will retreat into the old and passive ways of gentleness, which sometimes turn to helplessness and inactivity, because becoming God's person doesn't agree with what our society expects of a girl or woman.

I: I pray that the thought of new opportunities will excite me to greater willingness to serve both here at _____ and elsewhere, and to gain a clear concept of human needs of girls and women which can be met in Christ.

II: I fear I will want to retain the old patterns and habits "because we've always done it that way" and that, at times, I will be tempted to give up and drop away entirely from those who want to serve God.

I: I pray for a willingness to pay the price of being one of Christ's disciples and to be ready to stand against sin and corruption and injustice and to speak for truth and the Gospel right here in _____.

II: I fear I will give in to my own deep temptations to selfishness because I have been taught to love and enjoy "rich and creamy" living. I fear that I will yield to indulging in the little tricks of being a woman and to looking for trivial tasks to keep from doing God's greater work.

I: I pray for greater understanding of each other and of our gifts, and for real Christian fellowship in which there is freedom to risk, to share, to be happy and to be sad together.

II: I fear we will allow the old patterns of rivalry, to be the best Zwieback baker, the best singer, the best seamstress, to overcome our desire for unity.

All: Lord, you know the desires of our hearts. You know our longings and our fears. Help us in your strength to conquer our fears with your love.

Katie Funk Wiebe
Hillsboro, Kansas

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MORE RESOURCES

Women and Worship by Sharon and Thomas Neuffer Emswiler is a handy little guide to non-sexist hymns, prayers and liturgies.

Prepared by this husband-wife ministerial team, the book provides suggestions for rewriting hymns, planning services and leading worship. Several examples of various parts of worship are given, some rather trendy but some very helpful. These are preceeded by chapters on biblical attitudes to women and feelings of women about chauvinism in worship. There is even a chapter on "How to handle objections to changes in your service."

Although renaming God "Mother/father" and eliminating all male pronouns in hymns may strike many as a rather fruitless exercise, the book is a basically useful guide for restructuring worship.

ADVENT - A POEM

With Leda in mind
 Mary's father warned her
 to avoid swans;
 her mother even thought
 to mention men.

No one suspected doves
 until an angel hailed her
 casually as a taxi
 and told her she'd soon
 be filled with more than grace.
 Matthew and Luke
 report the assignation,
 but about the encounter itself
 all four Gospels blush silence.

In practice we've assumed
 the formerly adolescent Jehovah
 (touchdowns of fire and brimstone)
 proved his masculinity
 and became the fond
 New Testament Father,
 hosting open house
 at many mansions.

Magnificat.
 What can it mean
 but that her feminine soul
 gave his a new dimension.
 Gradually it became catholic
 even to approach him
 chiefly through her.

Advent.
 Waiting for the birth
 of a Whole God.

Kathryn Christenson
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 Century.

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KALEIDOSCOPE
ON MEN AND WOMEN

(The following are a few excerpts from
 a reading which combines entries from
 a woman's journal with commentaries on
 various perspectives of the human
 species which we call women and men.
 Available from Herta Funk, General Con-
 ference Mennonite Church, 722 Main St.,
 Newton, Kan. 67114.)

Journal entry: I was sitting in class at
 the university, waiting for the lecture to
 begin, when a married female student, who is
 taking only one course, walked in. The girl
 beside me said: "See her? What a beaver
 she is in this course. Why does she have
 to make it so obvious that she wants a good
 mark? But then, being a housewife, what
 else would she have to do that would occu-
 py her mind? Taking this course is probab-
 ly the most intelligent thing she does all
 week!"

Commentary: Woman has a fibre more in the
 heart and a cell less in the brain, argued
 William Booth during his engagement to
 Catherine. Unless William would change,
 Catherine threatened, the engagement would
 have to be broken. Gradually William be-
 gan to acquiesce, and in 1855 they were
 married.

Journal entry: Dorothy, the wife of a minis-
 ter, had some ministering gifts herself. The
 church had recognized them by licensing her.
 When Vernard Eller came to speak at the local
 ministers' conference, she registered. Af-
 terwards a minister stopped her, apologiz-
 ing profusely that this time there had been
 no special meeting for the ministers' wives.
 "That's all right," said Dorothy, "I really
 wanted to hear Vernard Eller." To which
 the minister replied, "But could you really
 understand him?"

Commentary: The event was the Continental
 Congress on the Family in St. Louis in the
 fall of 1975. A roomful of assorted church
 workers was engrossed in a small-group
 discussion on ministry to the widowed, di-
 vorced, and unmarried persons in the church.
 "Why is it so difficult for single and mar-
 ried persons to be friends?" queried the
 discussion leader. One by one the church
 workers confessed, "We do not want to jeop-
 ardize our own marriages." Somewhat sur-
 prised at such a response from a number of
 ministers, the leader asked, "In that case
 is it time to rethink the ministry as an
 all-male profession? Perhaps some women and
 some wives of ministers could legitimately
 minister where men feel the risks are too
 high."

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